

A photograph of a modern building with a courtyard. The building has a blue and white facade with balconies. In the foreground, there is a green lawn. In the middle ground, there are several trees with green leaves, a paved path, and a wooden bench. The sky is clear and blue.

place
design
group.

DESIGN FOR OPPORTUNITY

AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE FOR A GLOBAL
AGING POPULATION

Now more than ever we are living in a period of change. Where once we were slow to adapt and evolve, this century is already proving to show the biggest monumental shift in human history.

Two of the defining megatrends which are driving this change are the rapid aging of our global population and urbanisation.

Today marks a point where for the first time we have more people aged over 65 than there are children under five and this is set to increase, with the global population of over 60-year old's projected to double to 2.1 billion by 2050. With 54% of people already living in our cities, and the United Nations and International Organisation for Migration estimating this to increase to two-thirds of people in the next 15-30 years, this shift in demographics and locality means now, more than ever we need to adapt and evolve the way we design our cities.

In January 2020 the concept of change fundamentally shifted for all ages of our population with the global COVID-19 pandemic. As of August 2020 more than 36 million cases had been confirmed with a 4% mortality rate, of which 60% were over 80 years old. Whilst the elderly have been those most at risk of severe disease, hospitalisation and death from COVID-19, it is the shared experience of isolation and loneliness that has seen the greatest shift in attitude. Isolation is one of the most common experiences of those over 60, and due to COVID-19 it is now an experience that has been lived, and continues to be lived, by every age and every corner of our world.

Facing a need for rapid evolution due to the impacts of COVID-19, in addition to our aging population and urbanisation, we cannot look at this as a negative challenge. We need to view these experiences of isolation, that we have all shared, as opportunities. We look at aging, urbanisation and the realities of the changing world we live in today, we need to focus on Design for Opportunity.

Place Design Group has for many years worked alongside aging communities. Through these partnerships, in-depth research, and review of changing practices in the face of COVID-19, we have developed 10 key principles to guide how we design for opportunity and promote a more sustainable and inclusive future.

10 Design Principles

1. Physical & visual access

PROVIDING ACCESS TO A COURTYARD, A VIEW TOWARDS GREEN SPACE OR A GARDEN OUTLOOK ALL CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR THOSE IN SENIOR LIVING,

2. Movement, exercise & activity

DESIGNED ELEMENTS TO SUPPORT ACTIVITY OR EXERCISE FOR INDIVIDUALS, AND INCORPORATING GREEN SPACES THAT ENABLE PEOPLE TO CONNECT AND THAT PROMOTE INCIDENTAL INTERACTION.

3. Choice and change

SPACES THAT PROVIDE CHOICE FOR ALL THAT USE IT AND ENABLE CHANGE TO OCCUR WHICH ADAPT TO THE EVOLVING NEEDS OF ITS USERS. ALLOWING EQUITABLE ACCESS BY ELIMINATING STEPS, AND PROVIDING ALTERNATIVES SUCH AS RAMPS, BRIDGES AND EXTERNAL LIFTS TO ENSURE BARRIER FREE DESIGN.

4. Prospect and refuge

DESIGNING FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION - SPACES TO SIT ALONE AND RECUPERATE, EAT OR READ, CAN MANIFEST ITSELF IN A SIMPLE BENCH SEAT. WHILE PROSPECT CAN BE ACHIEVED THROUGH AN ELEVATED POSITION.

5. Green space for companion animals

WHEN CONSIDERING PETS CONSIDERATION IS NEEDED OF THE BROADER PROVISIONS OF SHELTER, DRINKING FOUNTAINS, BINS AND BAG DISPENSERS. APPROPRIATE ZONES FOR ACTIVE AND PASSIVE SPACES FOR PETS, WHILST PROVISIONING AREAS FOR THOSE NOT WANTING THIS FORM OF INTERACTION.

6. Social engagement programming

CREATE GREEN SPACES THAT CAN BE UTILISED FOR DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES TO CONNECT WITH DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS, EXPERIENCES, AND HOBBIES.

7. Supportive local neighbourhoods

TRANSFORMATION OF OUR CITIES TO BECOME INCLUSIVE AND LIVEABLE TO SUPPORT OUR AGING POPULATION TO ACCESS PLACES AND EXPERIENCE A SAFE AND COMFORTABLE PUBLIC REALM.

8. Health to your door

TECHNOLOGY THAT ASSISTS IN MONITORING HEALTH, AID MOBILITY, ORGANISE INFORMATION, CARRY OUT MENIAL TASKS AND ENHANCE ENTERTATINMENT, THROUGH AUTONOMOUS MOBILE ROBOTS, TELEHEALTH AND VIRTUAL HEALTH CARE APPS.

9. Places with meaning

PLACES THAT REFLECT CULTURES AND EXPERIENCES, WHERE USERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO ENGAGE, EMOTIONALLY, COGNITIVELY, AND PHYSICALLY, THEREBY HAVING A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE.

10. Intergenerational interaction

WAYS TO ENABLE MULTIGENERATIONAL INTERACTION WITHIN GREEN SPACES. THROUGH INTERGENERATIONAL PLAYGROUNDS WHERE GRANDPARENTS AND CHILDREN ALIKE CAN PLAY, THROUGH COMMUNITY GARDENS FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD GENERATIONS TO INTERACT, OR THROUGH OPEN SPACES FOR SHARED ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS.

These 10 design principles are transferable across a multitude of private or public open spaces; as landscape architects we have an obligation to champion design led responses that will help tackle many of the challenges that face our aging communities. We need to be advocating for, amongst other things, healthy communities and the key role that open spaces play in community, physical and mental health, and wellbeing.

2020 has brought about some marked changes in the way people feel about their own health and wellbeing, and that of their family. No longer is the challenge of isolation that face many of our aging communities 'out of sight, and therefore out of mind'. There is a greater awareness for the challenges they face, and the design needs they have. Now is the time to capture this and engage with government, policy makers and industry to develop strong allies for greater design outcomes to not only reduce health expenditures and our development economic impact, but also achieve an overall better quality of life for our cities' residents.

We have an opportunity right now to create more inclusive, resilient and integrated communities for all ages.



Penny Spiers launched the 10 design principles at the Australian Trade and Investment Commission's, Australia-China Hospital & Aged Care Facility Design Cooperation online forum, in September 2020.

Penny Spiers is a Registered Landscape Architect, former Vice President and Treasurer of AILA QLD, and an active member of a number of AILA National and State Committees. She is a Principal with Place Design Group and has 20 years' experience leading complex projects for parks and open spaces, urban and commercial centres, residential subdivisions, schools and educational facilities, with a real passion to improve the function and design for health and aged care facilities across Australia.

FOR A MORE IN DEPTH DISCUSSION WE WOULD BE HAPPY TO SPEAK TO YOU DIRECTLY:
E: PENNY.S@PLACEDESIGNGROUP.COM
T: +61 7 3852 3922



place
design
group.

Australia
China
South East Asia



placedesigngroup.com